

# A snowball's chance in hell

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

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Snow Bros, an 'Amiga Games that Weren't' poster boy for fifteen years, has now been a 'Game That *Is*' for ten. Originally developed by Toaplan and published by Capcom in 1990 for the arcade coin-op format, the slick Bubbly-Bobbly, one-screen platformer was slated for an Amiga and Atari ST port the following year.

Ocean France (of Pang and Toki fame!) were given the go-ahead to begin development by the UK-based mothership, and previews showing significant progress appeared in no fewer than five Amiga magazines between February and May 1991.

It showed great promise, lending an innovative new twist to a tired genre, ran at an impressive 50 frames per second, featured 32 colours and a unique intro sequence absent from the original. The intricate level of detail evident in the cutesy sprites and lush backgrounds was exquisite, whilst the feel-good music with its circus overtones was jovial and bouncy

without ever being overly intrusive, stamping the entire package with the Ocean France signature seal of quality.





Its only real compromises were the loss of the cooperative play option which made Bubble Bobble such an entertaining experience in the arcade *and* at home, and the letter-collecting bonus feature akin to that found in similar Taito games. Notwithstanding it was an eagerly awaited title that deserved to see the light of day.

**You took balloon rides in Bubble Bobble™...  
Now take some quarter rides with**

# SNOW BROS.™



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The paper-thin plot is typical of arcade coin-guzzlers of the time. You play as Nick, one of the princes of Whiteland

(brother Tom is MIA), and your princess girlfriend, Teri or Tina, I'm not sure which, has been kidnapped by the dastardly muscle-rippled, reptilian-esque King Scorch and turned you into a snowman. As I'm sure you'll agree, this could stick a bothersome spoke in the wheel of any rescue attempt we care to embark upon.



As chance (or possibly Thor) would have it, lightning strikes our inanimate protagonist, serendipitously transmuting him into Mr Frosty with fully functioning limbs. Even so, obviously we can't let this lie so off we toddle to emancipate our beloved from impending peril.

This entails battling all manner of inventive gribbles, employing your trusty snowball as a weapon. Launch several on-target attacks and they become encased in a mega-snowball, which can be kicked into other opponents to clear the screen and earn you a menagerie of potion power-ups and point bonuses. The most substantial caches are

rewarded if you can flush away all the baddies with a single icy avalanche.



The benefits of the various potions are delineated by colour. Yellow potions extend the range of your shot, red ones speed up your rate of fire, blue ones increase the volume of your snowballs, thereby reducing the time taken to freeze an opponent, whilst the green ones pump you up like the Staypuft marshmallow man allowing you to swoop around the screen bumping off whatever you come into contact with.

It just goes to show that drinking from unmarked bottles can prove to be the elixir that grants good health and longevity. An excellent life-lesson kids.

There are 50 frantic, rapid-fire levels to tackle, split into 5 distinctive worlds, each presided over by some of the most



novel bosses ever seen in a single screen platform romp of this nature.



You really have to pull out the stops to pick fault, so why wasn't it published back in May 1991 as planned? It depends who you believe. The way Gary Bracey, production director of Ocean UK, tells it, Ocean France repeatedly failed to meet their deadline targets, and lack of faith that the project would bear fruit meant the release would no longer be commercially viable, hence it was shelved indefinitely.

"But the problem was they were always SO late on everything. I mean, in an industry where tardiness was the rule rather than the exception anyway, they were consistently way, way behind schedule.

I'm sure part of that was their striving for perfection as they always took great pride in what they did, but things

got a little out of hand with regard to scheduling.... which is why Snow Bros was never released - it was too late, I guess.

Finally, as for why Snow Bros was cancelled, I don't honestly remember. I do know that a lot of money was spent on press ads marketing the game, but the slippage began to cause upset internally - we were paying for advertising for a game that wasn't ready. I think everyone lost patience and as Sales and Marketing did not believe it was such a strong title to begin with, then it was probably canned 'by committee'.

It's difficult to recall the circumstance for each game and so I can't give you a definitive reply on this one - I'll have to speculate on some elements.

The problem is (was) that the cost of releasing a 'lower profile' game (i.e. one without an expensive licensed attached) was mainly in the marketing and distribution of that game. Bear in mind that, unlike today, games didn't cost millions of dollars to develop. However, what did make it so expensive was advertising and sales. WHSmith, for instance, would want £X,000 for having a game in their chart, and all of the major stores demanded payment for 'prime positions' in their racks. Multiply this by the hundreds of different territories we would sell in, and then add all the promotions and magazine ads to those territories and you get an idea of the scale of cost I'm talking about. Note also that if you didn't do any of this then the game wouldn't sell at all and the stock would have been returned!

If we had been just a month late, then it would have been sensible to try and release and recoup. However, as memory serves, Ocean France were never just a month



late. In all cases they were MANY months late and in a few cases the project was scrapped because of this.

I must admit to thinking the latter of Snow Bros as I do remember it was very late and in fact, I don't recall it ever being finished.

If it was, then there could have been additional factors why it wasn't released as well as the ones above. For example, it may have clashed with a 'bigger' release and therefore would have been buried; stores were no longer interested in stocking it; the Sales Team had low pre-orders; etc."



Delphine and Ocean graphician, Denis Mercier (aka dlfrsilver), although he didn't work on Snow Bros personally, paints a different picture entirely, asserting that the game was complete and ready for publication only a month behind

schedule. Instead, he cites Oceans' inability to secure the license from Capcom as the reason for Snow Bros' terminal stagnation.

Interviews with Marc Djan, head of Ocean France, add weight to this assertion. He reveals that development would sometimes begin even before Gary had secured the rights to port a game if he thought the relationship between himself and the copyright holders was sufficiently robust so as to be able to make assumptions.

"Most of the time we even started to code before we had the rights, but I was only choosing coin-ops where I knew Ocean had a good relationship with the manufacturer.

In 1990-1991 I decided to go for some coin-ops from Taito like Liquid Kids etc... but Ocean UK were never able to get the license for those."



Whatever the explanation, it's water under the bridge now. Denis managed to track down the finalised IPF master disk and make it available to the public, Bertrand aka CFou took care of authoring the WHDLoad version, while Galahad cracked it for the ADF release, salvaging from oblivion the many months of work painstakingly poured into the project by the supremely talented development team; coder, Pierre Adane, graphics artists, Philippe Dessoly, Lionel Dessoly and Christophe Soeur, and musicians Raphael Gesqua and Jean Baudlot. It's safe to say the news was met with enthusiasm - there's a 27-page thread about it over on the English Amiga Board. 27 pages!

...even if Gary doesn't approve...

"Anyway, now you can all can be happy that it is illegally available in pirated form - at least it can be judged against the likes of Rainbow Islands in terms of quality. Personally, I don't think it comes anywhere close (although the conversion may indeed be perfect). But that's the beauty of entertainment products generally - everyone has a diverse opinion."

As the game concludes we discover a message from Pierre to Gary Bracey, "in the hope you'll appreciate our work", which seems to suggest this wasn't always forthcoming.

Snow Bros wasn't the lost cause the Amiga version was assumed to be where *all* the competing platforms were concerned. A downscaled Game Boy port was published in 1991 along with a garish NES conversion, and lucky Mega Drive owners were gifted an official port by Toaplan themselves in 1993.



The game was originally destined for a ZX Spectrum release courtesy of Ocean France, though mirroring the fate of the Amiga saga, it never surfaced. Not officially in any case; in 2012 Climacus, Radastan and Shiru grew tired of waiting and treated Speccy owners to a colour-clash-free, fan-made conversion.

Amstrad CPC/GX4000, Commodore 64/GS and Atari ST gamers didn't fare quite so well; they were deprived of an Ocean France port at the time and sadly the original source code is thought to have been lost.

Nevertheless, a 'CPC Bros' fan game by 'Pacomix' has been languishing in the prototype phase for several years now, as has a preview of a C64 homage by 'Black Turk' which employs sprites ripped from the NES port.

Clearly the magnetic charm of Snow Bros still resonates with nostalgic gamers given that as of this year, thanks to ISAC Entertainment, iOS and Android users can now also join the fray.

Heh, perhaps Hades isn't quite as toasty as Beelzebub would have us believe.

